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ABSTRACT

The Coalition of Essential Schools is involved in a 3-year study to translate collaborative inquiry into a research process to simultaneously build schools' capacities for change. A current collaborative project is described, with a dialog between a principal, a teacher, and a researcher who are engaged in a process of school improvement. Members of the Coalition of Essential Schools have agreed to translate nine Common Principles, a set of common sense ideas for improvement, into their own contexts. The case study at one site attempting to implement the change process illustrates the difficulties and benefits of collaboration between researchers and practitioners. The report of a site visit by the researcher stirred conflicting and complex emotions on the part of teachers and the principal. Teacher, researcher, and principal reactions are reported, with the eventual outcome in terms of increased openness among the parties to the school study and educational change. Appendix A lists the nine Common Principles of the coalition. Contains 38 references. (SLD)

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Roses, Retrievers and Research: Collaborative Inquiry to Foster Better Schools

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Setting the Stage: A researcher's perspective

As spring creeps slowly forward, I begin again to think about my garden and of the new test roses I will plant this year. They are hybrids, two plants crossed to form one slightly more magnificent than either parent plant—a hardier stalk with greater fragrance, or larger flowers with truer colors. As I fence off the new beds to keep the dogs out, I am reminded that they too have been crossed for greater utility. My retriever, Samantha, is the result of slow cross breeding over time for a soft mouth, a willingness to swim and bring things back to the people with whom she works. While we don't hunt, she does retrieve slippers, garden tools, the neighbor kids' toys. Useful.

It occurs to me that the Coalition of Essential Schools works differently, obviously, but hopes for the same ends. We work slowly over time to build stronger schools by combining the efforts of a small staff at Brown University with the efforts of colleagues who work in schools. For the last nine years, the hope has been that our combined efforts to think hard, build, reflect, and then, redesign again, our schools will become better places where all students learn to use their minds well. Over the years the Coalition has attempted to strengthen schools' capacity to change through a series of collaborative action projects and research projects, each growing out of the other, each a hybridization of the last, each influenced by the interplay between the staff at Brown and our partners in the field. Through these projects, we have worked steadily to build a more effective dialogue about school change and to increase our understanding about how progress is made and maintained.

Over the years, the work of hybridizing, of combining effort and expertise has not yet generated a fool proof formula or procedure for highly engaging schools. And yet, while the going seems terrifically slow, we've learned a great deal from our work and from others similarly engaged: School change is exceedingly difficult and takes far more time than anyone imagined. Few traditional high schools have been able to move from a small group of supporters to whole school change. Faculty in reforming schools spend more time planning change strategies than assessing existing practices to uncover basic beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that drive their work in schools. Their reticence to engage in serious analysis seems to emerge from norms which suggest that planning for tomorrow is much more powerful than examining what happened today, yesterday, historically. In many cases, because that analysis does not take place, the changes made tinker more than build significantly different possibilities for kids. (Corey, 1963; Sarason, 1971 & 1991; Cuban, 1990, 1984; Cohen, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Sizer, 1992; Muncey & McQuillan, 1992, 1993; Wasley, in press.) Such recognition at the Coalition brings with it heightened responsibility to break through these barriers, to devise processes for more powerful collaborative action which fosters more analytic work which aims at better schooling for all students.

We want to describe a project underway at the Coalition which attempts to do that. We are in the midst of a three year study to translate collaborative inquiry into a research process to simultaneously build schools' capacity for change while contributing to our understanding about the nature of change, how

it is encouraged and supported. This work is a new attempt to cross-breed, to hybridize the purposes of research with the goals of school change to strengthen the work of both. What follows includes a brief description of my understanding of collaborative inquiry followed by a brief history of such inquiry at the Coalition. These then set the stage for a description of our current collaborative inquiry, and a dialogue between a principal, a teacher and a researcher who are engaged together in the process of creating better schools.[1]

Collaborative Inquiry and the Coalition

Collaborative inquiry takes its roots from many sources. For years, Seymour Sarason has been writing about the need for change in schools. (1971, 1991) He has long advocated that the system as we know it is too bureaucratized, too isolating—each role group unto its own world—and that this contributes greatly to the intractability of the regularities in schools. Things like schedules, bells, end of year exams are regular features in schools, but do not necessarily contribute to powerful learning for kids. Over and over again he has advocated for a system which allows each member greater access to those whose roles are different. He also makes the point that change cannot be done by insiders alone, or by outsiders alone, but that people from different places in the system must work together. The formula for shared understandings about different roles and for collaborative problem solving remains illusive.

Years ago, Ann Lieberman worked on a project in the League of Cooperating Schools at UCLA. Her task was to give feedback to a group of principals about the research she and colleagues had been conducting. Stomach churning, she agonized trying to figure out how to give tough feedback while maintaining their trust and interest in working together. Much to her surprise, they were receptive. Since then she has been encouraging closer collaboration between universities and schools as a means by which to generate more accurate and more powerful understandings about teaching, learning and schools. (Lieberman, et al., 1973.) She has long advocated for closer collaboration between researchers and practitioners to promote greater depth and accuracy for all. In spite of this early work, many questions remain about the delivery of feedback and its utility. (Lieberman, 1986a and b.)

John Goodlad and his colleagues at the Center for School Renewal have worked for years to build stronger school/university partnerships to strengthen both institutions. To create an ecology for the continuous renewal of both, Goodlad suggests that projects of mutual interest must be generated and responsibility shared. (Goodlad, 1987.) Again, traditional roles—university professors as teachers; school practitioners as students—makes the development of this collaborative culture challenging.

Another contributing argument for collaborative inquiry emerges from recent discussions about critical inquiry, its nature and processes. (Friere, 1970;

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[1]The School Change Study is generously funded by Exxon Education Foundation, DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Habermas, 1973; Shor, 1980; Sirotnik and Oakes, 1983) At its best, critical inquiry describes a process to foster social change through the involvement of those most in need of new structures and practices. More recently, school reformers have described critical inquiry as central to serious reform in schools. Sirotnik (1991) and Sirotnik and Oakes (1986) outline the characteristics of a praxis for critical inquiry. Groups must be challenged to think together about their own underlying interests and ideologies in hopes of creating better worlds and more effective systems. The current dilemma lies in negotiating a kind of balance between top down and bottom up change in schools, so that those who work in schools have the very real opportunity to influence the changes they believe should be made.

All of these scholars suggest that to build better schools we need to collaborate across roles and organizations. They also suggest that collaborative work requires dialectics, argumentation and mutual investigation, dialogues, clear communication between the collaborating partners, and shared purposes. Collaborative inquiry is, then, the process of engaging in inquiry on a topic of mutual interest, negotiating the conditions of the partnership, and, once underway, communicating about the subject of our inquiry. In theory, it makes sense; in practice, it, like new roses, sometimes results in more thorns than flowers.

Since its inception in 1984 by Theodore Sizer and a small number of practitioner colleagues, the Coalition has been a loosely structured partnership based on the premises of collaborative inquiry. All parties involved agree to translate the 9 Common Principles (9CPs) into action in schools. (See Appendix A.) These principles are a set of common sense ideas, many of which have been well debated by centuries of educational theorists. In this case, however, they emerged from A Study of High Schools.[2] An interdependent set of ideas, the 9CPs should produce schools from which all students graduate more confident about their own capacity to learn and their ability to contribute to our society.

In the beginning, partnership in the Coalition suggested that member schools embraced these ideas and interpreted them individually according to the values, beliefs and customs of their local contexts. A common refrain has been that just as no two good students are alike, so no two good schools are alike. By suggesting that schools interpret the principles in their own contexts, the Coalition holds that the intellectual and analytic work of determining what to change and how to change is the central responsibility of those in the school. Involvement of teachers, administrators, parents and students in constructing the course of reform and in doing the analytical and imaginative work of reshaping their local schools has been a constant recommendation in the reform literature as well as a central tenet in critical inquiry. (Sarason, 1971 & 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984; Cuban, 1988; Cohen, 1988; Lieberman and Miller, 1988)

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[2]The findings from A Study of HIgh Schools is reported in three volumes: *Horace's Compromise* (Sizer, 1984); *The Shopping Mall High School* (Powell, et. al, 1985) and *The Last Little Citadel* (Hampel, 1986)

Over the years, the dialogue has moved back and forth between the schools and the central staff. As a result of school requests, new partnerships were formed with the Education Commission of the States and interested states in 1987 to build systems better able to support changing schools.[3] In order to help schools gain better dialogic and analytic support, the Coalition designed and conducts year long seminars in the management of change during which schools are grouped in critical friend teams. (Watkins, 1992) Joe McDonald and a small number of practitioner colleagues have been working to understand what it means when students graduate by exhibition and what the effects of planning backwards are in schools. (McDonald, et al., 1993; McDonald, 1991, 1992a and b.) Horace Smith, the fictional English teacher in *Horace's Compromise*, has become the chair of a school redesign committee, and illustrates both the lessons learned and the obstacles that remain in Coalition Schools interested in significant change. (Sizer, 1992) Teacher colleagues and I are trying to understand what happens when veteran teachers undertake significant classroom change. (Wasley, in press) In addition, the Coalition is in the process of building a national faculty of practitioners—teachers, principals, superintendents—educated to support and foster change both in their schools and in the schools of others. (Olson, 1992.)

While these manifestations of the Coalition's commitment to collaborative inquiry continue to grow, I began to think about its potential application in research. While we have been negotiating meaning with subjects to ensure greater accuracy, we needed more rigorous dialogue between whole schools and researchers, both to help the schools achieve their ends and to ensure the accuracy of the research. We designed a study which we believed would do just that by returning a series of snapshots to the school during the course of data gathering.

When we designed the study, we knew of no one who had attempted this kind of research. It isn't action research, but it is interactive, designed to affect the behavior of those studied. It consciously attempts to use research as a tool to build reflective practice, the value of which Schon and his colleagues have convinced us. (Schön, 1983, 1987.) We cast aside pretenses of distance since we wanted to affect the context as we went along. We wanted to look in schools and at the surrounding system at the same time. We wanted another set of "outsiders" to watch the process to help us understand the benefits and the tensions. We were encouraged by a number of colleagues who thought the design challenging and interesting. For those of us at the Coalition, it was worth doing because, as a partnership organization, we are bound in mutual obligation to find new and ever more powerful ways to work together while honing our mutual understandings of the benefits and barriers of change.

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[3]Entitled Re:Learning, there are now ten states involved. they are: New Mexico, Rhode Island, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Colorado, Arkansas, South Carolina, Maine, and Indiana. Other states are inconsideration. In addition, several regions have formalized agreements for the same purposes, to build better systemic support for changing schools. They are: southern California, the Bay Area, New York, Florida, and Louisville, Kentucky.

The project, currently mid-way through the second of three years, translates collaborative inquiry into a research process. A description of the basic design follows, after which we describe our first critical incident from the perspective of three of the stakeholders at one of the sites in our collaborative inquiry project. David Tripp, in his recent book, describes how the examination of single incidents can reveal the benefits, tensions and dilemmas inherent in a larger whole. (Tripp, in press) We agree. Multiple perspectives gathered around one critical incident help us to illustrate the difficult terrain of collaborative inquiry cum research. We are in hopes that our shared tale will retrieve something useful, perhaps help others who are working towards building more mutually sustaining research and better schools.

The Study

The school change study was designed to answer two broad questions we felt previous research as yet had left uncovered: 1. What is high school students' experience like in changing schools? 2. What is the interplay between a changing school and its surrounding context? To find answers to these questions, we are working in five schools in four states, following some 200 students through three of their high school years. The schools were selected because they each belonged to the Coalition for several years and demonstrated serious commitment to continue working on the implementation of the 9CPs. They also represent a cross section of the most common American high schools—urban, suburban, small town. Ten researchers are divided into 5 teams of three; several work at two sites. We spend two weeks a year in the schools—a week in the fall and again in the spring. While in the schools we shadow students through their classes, interview them, a small sample of parents, teachers, school board members and administrators. Another team of researchers tracks the policy arena, interviewing in state departments, governor's offices, and district offices so that we can place the schools' efforts to change within their proper context. Students and teachers at each site are writing weekly journals, and a colleague and students at Brown read the local newspapers to better understand what kind of information community members get about their local schools.

While the broader questions mentioned above guide the study, the substance of our mutual inquiry is more specific. We are investigating three themes in particular. We are interested to understand how the 9CPs are interpreted in each school, how each of the schools maintains the momentum for change over an extended period of time, and whether or not the work in these schools suggests whole school change.

The process of collaborative inquiry becomes apparent when, after each site visit, we return a thirty to forty page snapshot to the school which describes what the researchers saw and heard. This is our way of communicating with the school, and it is the tool we use to foster dialogue and to encourage analysis of existing practices and conditions in the school. We chose the term *snapshot* deliberately to acknowledge that we are capturing the school at work at a

particular point in time.[4] Over the duration of the study each school will get six of these snapshots which can be arranged into a kind of photo album. We wanted to provide schools with information about themselves which they do not ordinarily get—a mirror or an action photo at which they glance to see whether they are really doing what they say they want to do. Because schools generally lack the norms of collaborative inquiry, and the time for it, we hoped that the snapshots might provide a reflective tool to get them started, and with which they could build their skill over the three year period.

Each snapshot includes information from various perspectives: students, parents, school faculty, and in the spring, from the surrounding context. Each captures some component of classroom work, and each gives a brief analysis of the dominant emerging themes from our perspective. While everyone's names are changed and students are generally composite fictionalized characters, anonymity is not possible for the adults inside the school. There is after all, only one principal and, say, one English teacher who plays golf. However, all those featured in the snapshot are given an advance draft to critique and proof. Students and parents read the sections in which they feature.[5] Early respondents either write comments or call us with revisions. Meanings are negotiated between the research team leader and individuals participating in the study when necessary.

At the outset, the schools and researchers forged an agreement about the negotiation of meaning. We wanted to ensure that whatever was written represented what we really saw. At the same time, school faculty needed the ability to point out oversimplifications, erroneous assumptions and/or material which they felt was insulting. We agreed to chew on troublesome material until we developed mutually acceptable work, or, if we could not reach agreement, to include minority opinions. Just in case, we established a mutually acceptable committee who could function as arbitrators should we find ourselves truly stalemated.[6] Once the negotiations process is complete, the snapshots are distributed to the whole faculty. Again, revisions are suggested and those which both researchers and faculty agree on are made.

From the outset we hoped that the school would use the information contained in the snapshot to further their own work; they agreed to participate based on their own beliefs that it should prove useful. We also made it clear that

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[4]We acknowledge an important dept to Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's methodology of portraiture. Her work freed us to think about the metaphor that might best describe what we were trying to accomplish.

[5]At the outset of the study, faculty agreed to participate on the condition that inside their own school community, no one outside the faculty and administration would read the sections about classroom practice and about faculty discussions. Parents and students agreed to this condition as well.

[6]While the study is in progress, study participants and researchers agree to negotiate the meaning of any written material. At the conclusion of the study, however, the researchers will use the entire data corpus in an attempt to answer our broader questions and to pursue themes. All parties agreed in advance that what we write at the conclusion of the study will represent the perspective of the researchers.

after the school approved the final draft, the snapshots would be used as analytic tools with participants from other member schools and states in many of the Coalition's professional development activities.[7]

To better understand the effects of the snapshots on the schools and on the study itself, Ann Lieberman, Art Powell and Seymour Sarason agreed to function as an advisory committee to study the study. They provide feedback to both the schools and the researchers each year. Midyear, between the first and the second snapshot, they make a two day visit to one of the schools each, interview staff and students about their reactions to the snapshot and the research process, and then, in an open session with faculty, summarize the staff's response to the snapshots. The committee members then convey that same information back to the researchers. This was an attempt to equalize power across the study as much as possible so that a real dialogue could take place. The researchers care about what the advisory committee thinks of our work, but are prepared to put them in a critical capacity so that our school partners would have yet another vehicle for communicating their issues, concerns and understandings back to the researchers.

We all understood when we set out to do this that it would be tough going along the way. We did ask everyone to agree that no one would quit no matter how bad it got. Agreements made, puffed with the confidence of novices, we prepared for the first site visit and snapshot.

On the Way to the First Snapshot: The Principal's Perspective

Preparation for the School Change Study really began in July, 1991. I was delighted and surprised that our small suburban school had been asked to participate. Although we were working hard and receiving some local recognition, we sorely needed a friendly "critical" eye if we were going to deepen our work. Earlier, I studied and worked with Lawrence Kohlberg, on a study which linked theory and practice in more practical ways. This previous experience solidified my enthusiasm. But on that summer's night, when I went to meet Pat Wasley and began to understand how different this study was, and we explored the relationships embedded in such research, I was filled with misgivings. The study itself seemed highly complex; almost too scientific for a qualitative piece. I knew that Pat and Ann Lieberman had historically supported teacher empowerment (Lieberman and Miller, 1988; Wasley,1991). I was particularly anxious about whether researchers with this bias could possibly understand or favorably convey the role of a principal who exerted strong leadership in a changing school. Nonetheless, I left the meeting having decided that our school could only gain if the faculty agreed to participate. My concerns about the portrayal of the principal were no different than the concerns the faculty would have about the representation of their roles as teachers. I had to model an openness to critique and to do so, I needed to both back away from

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[7]The snapshots are available through the Coalition of Essential Schools, at Brown University.

trying to shape the study and I had to make myself an equal participant in it; this was a decision I would later question.

When we returned to school in the fall, we had a short timeline for deciding whether or not to participate since the researchers hoped to arrive for their first site visit in the early fall. Pat Wasley came to the school, and won the faculty with her enthusiasm and honest responses about the new territory we were entering. Some faculty who had been involved in *Learning Change* (Lester, Onore, 1990), a multi-year writing project which culminated in a book, expressed concern about confidentiality. Others asked what we might gain, some skeptics wondered what we might lose. At the faculty meeting, someone asked me if I would make the commitment to stay as principal for the duration of the study if they voted to do this. Even more than our vote to join the Coalition, I knew that this decision had to belong to the faculty regardless of me. In the tradition of our school, the faculty decided to meet again the next day for a secret ballot to be counted publicly. The fact that there was a nearly unanimous vote to participate, and that a veteran and second year teacher volunteered to coordinate the study seemed a strong affirmation of the faculty's interest in and commitment to their own forward progress. We all prepared for the October visit with enormous excitement.

The week of the site visit was an intensely emotional roller coaster. One teacher coordinator arrived with elaborate color-coded schedules of activities. After a welcome breakfast in the faculty room, the researchers hurried to their classes or focus groups or interviews armed with lap-top computers and tape recorders. I was nervous about asking how things were going for fear I would be perceived as intervening. For their part, there was no "down time" even for relaxing after school. Parents reported that one researcher typed away on her computer in the bleachers at a volleyball game! The research team reported that they worked even while exercising in the late afternoon. I imagined them "triangulating" their findings: did all parents, teacher, and students complain about some aspect of my work? By mid-week I began to see nothing but the blemishes in the school. I worked hard to model the objectivity which I did not feel. My original pride in being selected to participate in the study turned to despair as I imagined the researchers finding us impostors not really engaged in significant change at all. Still, at a dinner on Thursday night where the researchers reviewed for us what they'd seen, when they asked us how we wanted our feedback, we answered as though we were seasoned at this, "Give it to us straight!"

The time after the first site visit was one of enormous let-down. By Thanksgiving people were emotionally spent, and when we returned after Christmas I felt the need to close the school to visitors. Whether we were in a seasonal lull, at a difficult point in our work of change or reacting to the research is hard to say. I do believe that the intense scrutiny and self-reflection that the week's visit engendered subconsciously took a toll.

While we waited for the snapshot, several of us began to think about how to prepare for its arrival. We couldn't find any in-depth portrayals of whole-school change, so we decided to use a case study of an individual teacher written

by Pat Wasley. (Wasley, 1992.) The case showed many of the difficulties which occur in the midst of change, and showed that teacher's effort in a less than favorable light. We decided that by reading and discussing this case study in small groups, and trying to project how we might respond if we read something like this about ourselves, we had modeled a way of taking the study seriously and had done all we could to prepare ourselves for the first snapshot.

The Snapshot

My anxious anticipation seemed misguided when I actually read the first draft of the snapshot. The snapshot was 28 pages long and was crafted into a kind of story in which a number of role group conversations and classroom observations were revealed. It contained:

- a somewhat idealized picture of our village
- a section of conversation between freshmen, sophomores and juniors,
- a sound byte of faculty room talk,
- a conversation among 36 parents,
- an interview with the principal, and other administrators
- descriptions from 22 classroom visits,
- an analysis of how the nine common principles are being implemented.

Even the less flattering descriptions appeared to be accurate. I believed that the researchers had more than met their part of this collaboration and that the writing would provide the source of incredible professional development — until the faculty returned after the weekend.

My clearest recollection of the next week was closing my door, calling Pat's answering machine and telling her to get Ted Sizer because I was about to lose my school. I feared that the teachers wanted to abandon the Coalition and cancel the changes we'd already made. Teachers were buzzing in the hall, furious about descriptions of faculty room chatter about personal issues like menopause, the cruelty of the researchers to have pointed out a student falling asleep in a class, or for crediting students' claims that school was boring. The researchers reported that some kids described tedium and feeling trapped, particularly in math where "they are always reviewing old work and doing work for which they are unprepared. 'I can't do the homework from dittos when I don't understand what the word means.'" Similarly, "In science, our teacher gives us assignments, every couple of weeks we do a report, he doesn't teach anything." Waves of hysteria permeated the halls until I felt that everyone was upset. When a friend from a school which had left the Coalition called to say hi, I burst into tears and called Pat, fearing that our fate would be the same as his.

My overwhelming feeling was one of guilt. Teachers were in pain because I had relinquished my leadership role. Normally I would have protected them, but in my desire to stay neutral for my own depiction, I had failed to think about the snapshot from their perspective. After their reactions, I began to see my own characterization quite negatively. I was described as manipulative so many times that I began to wonder if I were masochistic.

I called a consultant very close to the school to help us, thinking that if I modeled her helping me respond to my negative portrayal I would help make it easier for others. Pat wanted to come to school, but we needed a cooling-off time. With the change study coordinators and a few key teachers, we decided to hold a faculty meeting because we always find comfort in the whole. Each person would write his/her reactions on a card. The coordinators read each response out loud so we could hear everyone's reactions to the snapshot instead of just those who tend to dominate the meetings. As the coordinators began reading the responses, my body stiffened as I— and people all over the room — kept tallies. The responses were, however, far more varied than the hallway conversation indicated. I remembered Pat's warning that if she weren't part of the solution she would never really be a partner again. At the end of the meeting, I told the faculty that Art Powell would be coming to talk with us about our reactions to the study and that Pat would then come to negotiate the next snapshot. I felt that the situation was relieved, but not resolved. I felt eager for Pat's visit, anxious that she felt welcome, interested myself to move forward with our collaborative inquiry.

Reactions: A Teacher's Perspective

Enthusiastic anticipation gave way to a gnawing anxiety when I first heard about the chance to participate in the school change study. My enthusiasm stemmed from a sense that this study had the possibility to model for our faculty the same sort of practice/ feedback/revision process that drives my own theories and practices of teaching and learning; in my own classroom, I try to structure learning so that students get feedback on their "practice" (a writing, for instance) in a way that gives them the opportunity to act on that feedback — by revising a writing in progress, or maybe by changing the way they approach the next writing. At the same time, I ask students for feedback as well, about how the class is, and isn't, supporting their learning. Together, we continue to construct how we learn together. I saw in the methods in the school change study a structure which had the potential to give us information about student learning in our school that might move us beyond tinkering with change to deep revision of our learning community — in other words, real systemic reform.

However, to be frank, my anxiety ran a little deeper than my anticipation: I also knew well the discomfort that inevitably comes from feedback. I knew we would hear things both individually and collectively that would not sit well. We could not avoid some disagreement, conflict. I was anxious about whether, collectively, we would respond simply by shoring up our individual defenses or whether we really would forge a new, mutually sustaining working relationship. My anxiety was perhaps more severe than my colleagues' because several years back, I had been "featured" in a book that analyzed our district's inservice project on learning across the disciplines. Lester and Onore's *Learning Change* (1990) includes a chapter, "Teacher As Leader," which discussed my role as a teacher "advisor." I remembered my first reading of that chapter about *me*: the authors saw me as a leader (easy for them to say, I thought to myself) and yet, the only

words that really hit home for me were the ones that I perceived revealed their lack of faith in my leadership ability. I squirmed uncomfortably as I read their contention, "If we had looked at Lonny only during her first year, we might not have been able to identify her as a leader or even to find evidence that would account for the enormous leap she made..." (p. 157). I engaged in an internal dialogue with them that escalated pretty quickly to anger and accusation: Didn't they understand what I had been going through in that time period? How could they possibly neglect so many crucial surrounding circumstances? Why hadn't they bothered to ask me about the many previous leadership roles I had played? Had they just been patronizing me with supportive comments at the time? Today, as I re-read that chapter, I am amazed (and not just a little sheepish) that I had focused so narrowly on one passage in a 16 page chapter, ignoring the larger context of a multi-layered theory about the need for teachers to have extended chances to practice, get feedback, and reflect on their work. When I first read the chapter, I was sure that my colleagues would see only the negative too, and think less of me. I felt as if I came across as a bumbling idiot, while another colleague came out quite brilliantly. So, in the course of our faculty debate about joining the study, when we frequently mentioned the need to use the change study as a mirror to reflect our practice back to us, when one teacher warned us that the ultimate purpose of any mirror was to illuminate "the fairest of them all" I knew exactly what he meant. I shared my anxiety with my colleagues at the meeting where we prepared for the first snapshot by reading the Judd case study; other teachers in our building who had also been part of or had read *Learning Change* told of the deep anger on the part of teachers from one building in our district who definitely had not been featured in a positive light, and who carried that anger still. We hoped our warnings might better prepare staff for the forthcoming snapshot.

When I first read the snapshot, I saw it as primarily accurate but not particularly explosive. Kids do make negative comments about their school experiences and I knew—from countless discussions in faculty rooms—that too often teachers brush it off when kids tell us, "...(our) classes are not interesting. We don't do anything that means anything to us. I can't see any connection between what we do and my life. It is so hard to get interested in it." (p. 8) I hoped that seeing kids' voices in print would inspire us to listen to them more closely. I also noted passages that, if they had been written about my classroom, would have been difficult to digest: "Some students appear otherwise engaged while some students attend to ...(the teacher,who) directs her comments to these." (p.19); "In a second... class, the teacher begins by handing out an assignment, but changes course and tells students they will do some kind of a lottery. Two students argue momentarily, but then acquiesce. Students dig coupons out of their wallets... Prizes are awarded — a bag of chips, a pencil." (p. 21) However, I believed that given the context of the whole snapshot, the picture was not primarily disheartening. Others' initial reactions seemed similar to mine, and the days immediately following the snapshot's first "viewing" were calm ones.

Looking back now, I see those days as the calm before the storm. A weekend passed (perhaps people did their first reading, or had time to read more

carefully) and then I began to take part in increasingly heated conversations, as people's reactions to what they'd read seemed to be escalating to hurt, anger, even fury. I began to worry: Too many thorns on this rose! Are we going to be able to retrieve anything useful from this? The hurt, understandably, seemed to come from individual's discomfort with the picture of their own or others' classrooms. As the discussion grew and hurt began to boil into anger, almost everything in the snapshot was questioned — even the fact that the fireplace in the library was described as "unlit", and that cords to computers were described as "tangled."

The anger was perhaps at its peak when Art Powell, a member of the advisory committee visited; Art called together focus groups to allow us to express our concerns, and he made it clear that we had taken a risk in even participating in the study, a risk he seemed to know would not have any pay off if no one heard our concerns. And so, people reacted ... strongly, sometimes bitterly... about what they saw as missing pieces (such as the lack of mention about the resource teachers) or what they read as "mean spirited and judgmental." Personally, there were a few occasions in the discussion where I had to bite my lip to stifle an ironic smile, for I wasn't always hearing my colleagues reacting to the snapshot, but rather, reliving my own discomfort in reading about myself in *Learning Change*. I smiled, too, at my own naivete — how could I have thought anyone would have heard my (and others') warnings — without ever having "been there"?

As we continued to talk with Art, however, as we discussed, and argued, we also started to register that some of what seemed critical to some did not appear critical to others. A lot of people were not upset that the fireplace was described as unlit; they didn't perceive it as an intentional dig. It seemed we were all beginning to inch toward the more distanced perspective required to actually participate in this study in the spirit in which it was designed. The final morning before Art left, he called a meeting of the whole faculty to report back to us what he had heard. We complimented him on his ability to reduce all those emotions to clear and concise information. In the weeks following Art's visit, we continued to build a new viewpoint; we read the second draft of the snapshot, and realized that our feedback was, in fact, being taken seriously. When we met with Pat to negotiate the content for the second snapshot, it seemed to me that we were beginning to take the first visible steps toward not merely accepting as accurate a reflection of life and learning in our school, but also toward using that mirror image to actually construct a better school.

Reactions: A Researcher

I worried the whole time I wrote the first snapshot. While I felt that we had been as clear as we could be about the fact that the faculty were going to get a snapshot that would show problems as well as gains, I knew that some of the information contained would be tough for staff to take. Many of the staff had been teaching there for a long time; between 80 and 90% of their kids went on to college. They believe themselves to be and are successful educators. Still, while

we saw pockets of excellent teaching, most of that was teacher centered. We saw much of what we'd read about in *Horace's Compromise* (1984) and in *A Place Called School* (1984): passive and disengaged students, fragmented curriculum geared toward coverage as opposed to understanding, and teachers who talked and talked and talked.

While we wanted to acknowledge their accumulated expertise, we also wanted to provide a glimpse of what a broader repertoire of instructional, curriculum and assessment techniques might do for their students. We believed that part of our responsibility in this collaborative inquiry was to ask tough questions and to pose alternatives, knowing full well that alternative images of teaching are difficult for teachers and principals to generate in the face of careers of constancy.

Throughout the data analysis and writing, I wondered whether this was a moral, ethical strategy, and whether it was any more likely to support them than any other study or action project. Whatever questions we asked, whatever alternatives we suggested implied that we knew how to do it better. If they perceived us as arrogant, the possibility that the snapshot might be useful to them would evaporate in thin air. I was conscious that we had two and a half more years to work together...

It took me several months to plow through all the data the research team collected and to cultivate it into something that honored all of our agreements. I worked hard to capture the warmth of the school and the kind of 50's strength and serenity that emanated from the place. I tried to make the thing readable and coherent as a story told from multiple perspectives, and I searched for words to be both respectful and honest about what we saw. My research team colleagues read the first draft and suggested substantial revisions for greater accuracy. I felt it was a balanced picture of a school in its fourth year of change struggling to move from a number of changes made to improve the system to second order changes—deeper, more substantial changes which might actually affect instruction. (Cuban, 1988) I sent it off to the advance readers both pleased with it and full of trepidation.

Two days later, Sherry King called and said that it was the best professional development support she'd had. She thought that while there was tough information in it, that it was accurate and the faculty would recognize that. I sat on the couch and heaved great sobs. I hadn't perceived how tight, nervous, frightened I'd been waiting for their reaction. The next day, we had a conference call with the advance readers. They suggested mainly editorial changes. Several said that it was right on; a couple thought that there might be strong reactions from some faculty but did not know what they would suggest as improvements. Again, I felt enormous relief.

Several days later, Sherry called, very tense, and said that she believed that she might lose her school, lose their trust and their willingness to work for change. The teachers were furious, the snapshot insulted them, broke the agreements we had forged and made them mistrustful of the Coalition. The faculty reaction, calm and quiet at first, was now a virtual maelstrom of negativity. She suggested that Ted Sizer better be ready to come and help her

salvage what she could. Horrified for her, but mortified by the suggestion, I snapped that we were not going to call in the boys to fix what the girls had begun. The conversation was not lengthy: Sherry suggested that she was going to develop a process for dealing with this; I volunteered to come immediately. She thought that was unwise; I suggested that if she shut me out of the solution, I'd never be able to work with the staff productively again. With no resolution, we hung up.

For the next few days, I felt terribly isolated. I discussed strategies and events with my colleagues, and prepared Art Powell for his approaching visit. Privately, I felt horrible. I went over and over in my mind whether they were simply having a strong reaction to unfamiliar information or whether we perceived the school inaccurately. Could three researchers who'd been at the school, all experienced observers in schools and school advocates, have been blind? Could these faculty, bright people, react so stridently if the information contained in the snapshot wasn't problematic? Several days later, I had a conference call with Sherry and the advance readers. They devised a process so that they could move private complaining into public consideration. Then, their reactions and comments would be typed and sent to me and to Art Powell. While I felt that the faculty should have the option of quitting, Sherry was adamant that we would not have a discussion about whether to proceed, only how.

The feedback sheets arrived. The following are excerpts from twelve teachers' responses:

1. It seems key to me for faculty to deal with what the kids say about being bored and not listened to. I am a little bothered by what happened when all of the teacher interviews, focus groups got juxtaposed into one conversation. I know there is some staff concern about how classroom visits were reported. I think it's an issue of consistency—sometimes the number of kids was reported, sometimes not. Statements like 'the kids seem engaged' implies that assumptions were made. I'm not sure that the comments about people joking about the 9CPs although real is totally reflective of the deep level of agonizing many people are going through. I think we need to haggle over this.

2. The researchers had a preconceived notion—accept the principles of the Coalition. In fact the only staff members who seem to come off with no criticism are both ardent supporters of the Coalition. Not all aspects of our school program were visited—guidance, physical education, the library, although the library was roughly criticized. Some of the staff were criticized—or ridiculed—and no reason for it. Frankly it came off in a mean-spirited way. There was a final question, 'is caring enough?' Who knows? We really haven't discussed what we want. Have we truly evaluated the Coalition? Would the staff vote the same way again? The overall report was repetitive. The tone never changed and it became a boring monotone.

3. The fireplace in the library is not oak, and computer cables do not line the floor. I find this lack of objective reporting disturbing and it caused me to wonder about the rest of the paper.

4. The introduction to the staff picks up on trivial personal female problems in the faculty room. Might gain a reader's interest, but surely does not reflect the lively discussions about educational issues that are far more frequent. I got the feeling that this bunch of teachers is very disorganized—hit and miss—not clear about the 9CPs and applying them in a patchwork manner to the usual stuff they continue to do. Surely these teachers may have been doing great stuff and are trying to do even more.

5. The general tone of the snapshot is negative. I wondered if it was written negatively on purpose as an impetus for us to improve our teaching techniques. Students are encouraged to

gripe about school, homework, tests. I feel that they need to accept the amount of work and that if they need to complain, they need to complain in a civilized way.

6. The snapshot was prescriptive. It did not document our efforts to change, but rather our efforts to change in a particular direction, namely in the direction of the 9CPs and CES. At first I was surprised, but then I was surprised that I was surprised. We did vote to try to move in this direction and the study is coming right from Sizerville. The faculty is more than friends. There is a genuine respect for each other on a professional basis. This didn't come through. Parts of the school were missing. The comment that we don't really understand the 9CPs was correct. We need to discuss them more. We haven't since voting to join.

7. I question the value of a study like this. How will it benefit us as teachers or the school as a whole? A fair picture of what a teacher is doing cannot be based on the observation of one lesson.

8. The snapshot went beyond the bounds of a lens capturing reality. It was as if the lens had a special filter attached which colored the results. What was seen was analyzed and sometimes judged. The bars of the cage shake, rattle and roll a bit.

9. It may be painful to read reactions, observations or criticism that are negative, but if we can get over this initial impact, we have so much to learn! Here we have a tremendous opportunity to receive a portrait of our practices done by professionals. To me this is an objective outside eye that can help us see how we are teaching and how we need to change. It will be a lot easier to adopt new teaching with such valuable feedback.

10. I think the snapshot was honest. Kids voices struck strong chords. The end affirmed our strong commitment and work. The middle lost how hard this all is.

11. I felt that we were farther along with implementation of Coalition principles. The research team obviously wants to see change over the three year period. Their view may place us back further than we really are.

12. When I was originally introduced to the Coalition concepts, I was led to believe that it allowed me the privilege of trying many new ideas, concepts and strategies for teaching. I thought that picking and choosing was part of it all. The feeling I got from the snapshot was quite different. If you don't wholeheartedly embrace the entire philosophy, there's something wrong. I didn't, I don't and I won't buy entire packages. I'm a professional educator with experience. I am capable of making decisions as to what is and isn't valid.

On and on I read. The kids agreed with their section, more, I think, because their comments were actually put in print than from careful analysis of its accuracy. Several parents felt that they'd had a much richer conversation and that collapsing an evening into a couple of pages didn't do them justice; others thought it was a good encapsulation. Surprisingly, much of the writing which I thought complimentary—like the description of the graceful old library—and the description of faculty room conversations—others perceived very negatively. I had organized eleven clips of classroom work some of which I thought described very good teaching; even these teachers perceived that the descriptions of their work were negative. In general, the faculty objected to such quick, decontextualized slices of classroom work. I got more feedback than I ever expected: Every faculty member responded, and in addition to the comments on the cards, I got letters from eight teachers.

As I read, tallied, read and tallied, I felt sick at my own belief that this would be helpful, embarrassed at my own miscalculations. (I was also very nervous about the response of the other schools as they were about to receive their snapshots.) And, I was angry. I believed that few people really read carefully, few had an understanding of the constraints that length and readability placed on the mountains of data. I felt that many of the teachers were defensive,

not at all prepared to stand back and consider what the snapshot might teach. I felt that many of their comments were just as mean-spirited as they perceived mine to be.

Over time, and without much grace, I began to sense my own defensiveness. Working through their comments and comparing it to the actual snapshot, I began to see that some of their comments were legitimate. There were inconsistencies in the classroom briefs. If all of the faculty perceived that the characterization of faculty room conversations as negative, it must be. There *were* value-laden words and phrases in the midst of description.

Art prepared a lengthy field note for us.

"The school Change Study entered the school at a particularly vulnerable time. Real (not cosmetic) changes had been made. But they were probably the kind of organizational and structural changes that were easiest to make. They gave an accurate impression of forward progress, but at a certain point you must go beyond mainstreaming, beyond creating seminars and Congresses. The school was at that point where the struggle to confront deeper change was just beginning. In particular the faculty was willing to say that:

♦it had not collectively delved deeply into the 9CPs; it had not really thought very seriously about them at all.

♦it was aware that different teachers were at very different stages of thinking about Coalition ideas;

♦it acknowledged that it was a small and homogeneous community where there was a good deal of professional respect among the members—the faculty could not hide behind impossible size of bitter factions as excuses for inaction...

Into the midst of this context of struggle comes the School Change Study. The effect it has <u>pains</u> the faculty more than angers it. Because it has this one singular effect: its critical stance puts the faculty—against its will and against its better judgement—<u>on the defensive</u>. The faculty got pushed back defending all the change it had made, change that it knew was insufficient, rather than got pushed forward to look at new ideas. By not recognizing the struggle within the faculty, the snapshot sapped energy from it."

While he was able to distill their concerns, he reinforced that this was a courageous effort on the part of the researchers, too, that the research techniques were innovative and designed to provide the school with support it wouldn't ordinarily get. Everyone felt soothed and able to go on. Personally, I felt simultaneously indicted and elevated by his summary.

I revised the snapshot and learned important lessons in the process. I was able to see what appeared judgmental and pull that out or I went back to the data to provide actual quotes from others. I understood that staff needed to understand the analytic processes I used which led me to a particular organizational format for the snapshot. Most importantly, we made a critical error in the translation of collaborative inquiry. While we negotiated the project carefully, we forgot to involve the faculty in generating the actual research protocols, so that they were less invested in the information we were seeking. Finally, in the snapshot I had not adequately acknowledged the very difficult progress they'd made so far—the changed schedule, a new governance structure which involved kids, faculty-based decision making, interdisciplinary work. Each of these had been hard-won changes and deserved significant attention.

I sent the next draft off and headed to the school to negotiate the next round. All the way to the school, I talked to myself about being honest and strong, able to take what I dish out gracefully. Nonetheless, I felt insecure,

frightened, angry and wounded. These people had said everything about me as a professional I never wanted to hear—that I was arrogant, an inaccurate researcher, personally grasping, out of touch in some privileged ivory tower. It seemed to me that Sherry greeted me coolly and, claiming an appointment, sent me into the faculty room. From my perspective, I thought she was communicating clearly: you got us into this mess; you need to salvage it.

When I walked into the faculty room, I was nauseated. Staff leapt to their feet, got me a chair. One woman said, "We behaved so badly; we thought you'd never come again. We're so glad you're here!"

Another asked, "How are the other researchers?" Near flooded with relief, I shovelled pasta salad and asked inane questions.

Once the whole faculty gathered after school, I recounted what I'd learned and asked the faculty to work with us to determine what information they would be most interested in pursuing in the next snapshot, and how we might treat classroom work in greater depth. They had their own questions. They asked whether given such a rough start, we would be able to come back to them with tough information again. Would we now be glossy? Wasn't this process of negotiations tainting the research? Why did we think that this was a better way to do it? Then we went to work preparing for our next visit. To my surprise, they asked us to gather information about one of the themes mentioned in the snapshot.

Since Then...

Since then, we have done two more snapshots, and are preparing our fourth. The second snapshot arrived at the school at the closing luncheon and while read by everyone, passed into summer oblivion. The third snapshot arrived in January of this year—now up to 55 pages as we tried to capture the progress of eight classes for a week each. The staff continue to ask us to pursue issues introduced to them in previous snapshots. They generated their year long faculty meeting agenda from issues in the snapshots, but spend little time discussing them collectively or with greater specificity. For instance, they have never had a whole faculty discussion about what kids are telling them. Staff have begun to shift their confidence in standardized tests, and are working with various kinds of instructional techniques. They have recently redesigned the schedule again for longer blocks of time. Students and parents continue to provide us with important perspectives, and appear to be important advocates for change. The parents we interview have been quite outspoken about their hope that standardized tests will not drive the curriculum, and that there kids come home from school interested in what they are doing there. Students continue to describe what kinds of activities are meaningful and growth producing for them.

At each of the other schools, the issues, the relationships, the context and their approach to Coalition work are different. Not surprisingly, their reactions to their own snapshots have been different. At Lincoln High, one of the most frequently studied schools in the country, staff read the snapshot with interest, but not much discussion. While they are in the middle of implementing near

whole faculty teaming, we are also in the midst of defining what we both mean by 'using the snapshots.' Initially, they believed that reading them was using them, since most of the research work conducted at their school is not returned to them. At all of the schools we have communicated that we think about 'use' more in terms of discussion, of using the information contained within to forge new directions. At Crossroads High School, the staff and administration have not yet been able to forge a good working relationship. The staff continues to suggest that the dismal conditions reported in the snapshot are accurate or too soft on the administrators. They have also asked for help in figuring out how to negotiate the circumstances at the school. The other two urban schools, added in the second year, are just receiving their initial snapshots, but they were part of early conversations this fall where the three original schools and the researchers debated the what we mean by use.

After each round of snapshots, we attempt to look across the sites to keep track of emerging cross-case themes. Some early, and perhaps predictable examples are:

1. The building of shared values is much more complicated than we expected and much more central to a significant change effort. The culture of autonomy is much stronger than the culture of collaboration and the incentives are not necessarily in place which would move people to change.

2. People are caught in the web of their individual conceptions of teaching and learning. Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are similar, however, and remain perhaps the strongest cross-cultural, cross-site characteristic . This undergirds every decision they make, and their beliefs about their own professional action. For instance, tracking is based on people's beliefs about how learning takes place, and it is difficult to undo tracking until these beliefs are rearranged.

3. Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are interrelated and must be considered as a single piece, rather than separately. This is contrary to most faculty inclinations in schools.

4. Pedagogy is the least considered topic in changing schools. Much more consideration is given to assessment, to curriculum, to schedules, to decision making than to actual teaching practices.

5. Unpredictable change is perhaps more certain than planned change and often confounds faculty attempts to orchestrate change. Teachers and principals move; kids enter and leave the school. The state changes its requirements; the district changes its focus. In the midst of so much unpredictable movement, planned change frequently sounds more like cacophony than a symphony.

In addition to learning about school change, we are learning about the conduct of this kind of research. While we recognize that we are only mid way through the study, we'd like to share several emerging themes which are helping us to understand the benefits and the problems of research cum collaborative inquiry.

Collaborative Inquiry As Research to Foster Whole School Change: Insights from a Teacher

I said originally that the school change study had the potential to move our school beyond tinkering with change to real systemic reform. I believed that because built in to the study were the continuous collaboration and reflection that are so foreign to life in most schools, and so much a part of what I see as the key to authentic teaching and learning. While earlier, I mentioned the difficulty I'd had seeing myself pictured in *Learning Change*, what I didn't discuss was the inservice project that the book analyzed. It had been a professional turning point for me, and for other colleagues in the district, because it provided a structure for on-going collaboration and reflection about both theory and practice. It had not been a typical "one-shot" inservice — where teaching methods are handed out like new mechanical parts for a learning machine, to be installed with no follow-up provided to check on the repairs. Rather, Nancy Lester and Cindy Onore, the facilitators of the Writing Workshop, asked us to reflect about our own learning and about changes we were making in our classrooms, to get feedback about those changes from them, each other and our students, and to use that feedback to revise our teaching. Over a period of several years, we built a community of teachers who reflected together as we all tried to move away from one-shot deals in our own classrooms. We wanted to move toward opportunities for students to reflect with us on their "practice" and what revisions they might choose to make. It was this same group that was already "in place" and eager to work with Sherry King when she became principal of Oak Hill and suggested further changes to the entire staff. Prior to the beginning of the school change study, I had viewed such a collaborative change process as the domain of small teams of teachers and their students. The school change study had the potential to bring similar feedback, reflection, and revision to the entire institution. Despite the fact that the incident described here was troublesome, it does offer an intriguing glimmer of initial success.

Looking back now, almost one year exactly to those difficult days when we received the first snapshot, I see it as a critical turning point for the whole faculty toward *real collaborative inquiry*. I emphasize *real* because I suspect that we — like most school communities — were not equipped originally to collaborate with Pat. We had no community framework for dealing with feedback, much less any sort of institutionalized practice to act on it. In fact, it's possible that the most important element in that first process was that our feedback to Art and subsequently to Pat was seriously attended to; they modeled for us the sort of thoughtful "revision" that we ourselves might consider after reading a snapshot. Without ever stating so publicly, it seems as though the faculty subsequently decided that if the researchers were going to act on their feedback, the faculty, in good faith, would need to decide together how to act on theirs.

What has happened since that time shows clear signs of the faculty revising our learning community. As a result of information in the second snapshot— information about staff interpretations of the 9 Common Principles

that we specifically asked the researchers to focus on — we are currently spending faculty meetings and inservice time revisiting the 9CPs. More significantly, in my mind, during one of those faculty meetings we asked whether or not current institutional practice in the school prompted students to use their minds well. The resulting faculty survey indicated few institutional practices that did. Accordingly, a scheduling committee is already at work to help us investigate possible alternative time structures that might foster more "in-depth" learning, and we have agreed that we need to decide together what specific learning outcomes must serve to focus all our work, regardless of discipline. Since this article was originally drafted, two teams of English and Social Studies teachers have requested that the new schedule be built so that their courses are completely integrated and team-taught; as a member of one of those teams, I know that the more we have the opportunity to collaborate, the more frustrating it is when time and scheduling return us to isolated practice. And, there is an indication that the process of collaborative institutional change encourages further individual change: snapshot # 3, just recently out, notes that teachers in the high school are continuing to broaden their collaboration with their colleagues and to seek ways to help each other reflect on their own practice as well as to learn about others' practices. It would seem that while small pockets of reflection and collaboration were present in the school when the study began, the study both made such activities more visible — and hence encouraged more faculty to become involved, and required that more people enter the discussion about the snapshots.

Clearly, to me, we are just beginning to think and act as a group that has shared values and common purposes, and so, we have a great distance to go. However, hope, at the moment, is bright: resistant strains against collaborative inquiry are weakening. Individual teachers have begun to ask the researchers for more feedback on their classrooms. We are looking into the snapshots to retrieve useful information about ourselves as we try to envision a school where both time and collaborative practice result in an institution where all kids can be smart.

Still, we are only mid way through the study. Breaking down isolation to create professional communities which place a child's long-term learning over a number of years first in their consideration will ultimately require much more than information retrieval. Questions remain: Can research which takes collaborative inquiry to heart be a key in a transformative model — where both students and teachers come to see learning as a continually constructive act? If the research like this fosters the faculty's realization that on-going feedback and reflection are elements that must be continually sustained, and provides the faculty with needed immersion and practice in such a process so that they maintain it after the study is gone, the answer will be clear.

Creating Critical Friendships: Insights from a Principal

My chief regret about the first year of the study is that we were so naive. We had ample reason to know that critical reflection is easier said than done.

Teachers were surprised and in many cases angry at their portrayals in *Learning Change*. They even warned us of this when we voted to participate, but we believed that this research would be different, that by saying we were partners we could establish an openness to professional critique which had no foundation in a school staffed by a highly seasoned faculty. Even those teachers involved in the writing project, who had worked together for many years, were willing to discuss practice, but not willing to critique each other in their classrooms. A consultant who has worked closely with staff for four years has been asked to look at assignments and samples of student work, but has never been invited into classrooms. The School Change Study was even more intimidating since it opened classroom practice not just to invited individuals, but to the whole faculty. We should have known that when the snapshot arrived that the portraits of individual practice would be explosive, and that our inclination would be to protect one another.

Hindsight has provided me with several important insights. I believe I could now better redirected the ground swell of anxiety which surrounded the arrival of the first snapshot by helping people re-focus on the school as a whole, rather than focusing on individual egos, including my own.

Then, I have learned that we must remember that whole school change is daunting. Teachers who do not necessarily share a common philosophy can't hide behind the privacy of their classrooms when the snapshot comes out. Students who come to the neighborhood school do not necessarily want to be held to higher standards; they may prefer the less taxing requirements their older siblings enjoyed. Parents whose children excelled under a more traditional system want assurances. While the School Change Study did not create these issues, it did illuminate all of them.

Finally, I am reminded by this incident that one can never tell when or why people are able to look carefully at their own practice. Today more teachers in our school talk about pedagogy than was the case a year ago. We also accept more responsibility for our part of the research process, asking for information from the researchers which we need to enhance our practice. Some staff insisted that we keep the tough descriptions—even of a student falling asleep in class—and their insistence helped generate self-reflection. Others listened to the voices of kids in the snapshots. Some individuals have not benefitted so much from the snapshots themselves but from the activities the faculty generates as a result of the written pieces. Still others have not gained from the study, but from other experiences like going to conferences, talking to faculty from other Coalition schools. For a few the need to consider and then act on the need for change has not come. I am increasingly aware that any single strategy, be it participation in a critical inquiry study, or the act of joining an organization, or peer observation is not enough to move an entire community. We need multiple strategies.

I do believe, however, that the study has pushed us harder as a group and that it has contributed significantly to our capacity for change. What I have come to understand is that the researchers and our faculty are building critical friendships. Critical in that they give tough feedback; critical, too, in that they are essential to helping us see ourselves. The question that keeps me awake these

nights is not what the snapshot will show, for I now understand that there really are no surprises; most of what appears I see daily. I wonder instead, how we will sustain the mirrors of our practice when the study is over. Can we translate focus groups into study groups? Will we be able to become critical friends in our own family?

Today the school is ready to move ahead with new schedules and increased collaboration, but classroom practice is still uneven. Will we have the ability to ask the necessary hard questions of each other when there are no researchers to record our conversations and track our practice? I am in hopes that the researchers will help us devise processes and strategies to make this likely when they leave.

Definitions of Usefulness and Feedback as Evaluation: Insights from a Researcher

I've gained two valuable insights since we've been engaged in this work. One deals with our collective definitions of what usefulness means. The second is related, but deals with the context in which teachers receive feedback.

My hope was that the study would be useful to both the researchers and the participants. I imagined that people would see the snapshots as mirrors into which they could look, step back and engage in some independent, but collective sense making. I wanted the researchers to do little of the analysis, leaving much of that to those in the school. My hope was that, once we had collaboratively negotiated the accuracy of the snapshots, the faculty as a group would determine what information emerged on which they might wish to take some action. "Usefulness" to me meant that the faculty would use the snapshots as an analytical tool which is how I, as a researcher, use them. Those are, however, the norms of researchers. We are expected to build in the time to look analytically at data.

What has actually occurred is quite different. Our colleagues in the school read the snapshot and took action only on recommendations we pointed out in the report. For instance we suggested that people had various definitions of the 9CPs. They asked us to investigate that further. Once we illustrated that, they set up meetings to build some shared definitions. I do not wish to suggest that we don't believe this is a fruitful strategy for them, because we think it was. They did not, however, step back as a group from any one of the snapshots to ask themselves, 'What do we think emerges from this picture of ourselves? What are students saying? Parents? What action might we devise as a result?'

The second insight is related in that how staff are accustomed to reacting to feedback might explain their approach to the usefulness of the snapshots. Feedback is only a regularity in schools in the form of staff evaluations. This might also explain the negative response to the first snapshot. Staff evaluations have been, for most, the only forum for exchange about teaching practices. Teachers and administrators at Oak Hill, as in most other schools, consider these perfunctory, one-sided and not particularly useful. They expect to hear a little about what they are doing well and more about what they

aren't doing so well. No one suggests that their evaluation is a source of professional growth. Teachers in general note that their reactions to their evaluations usually fall into a couple of categories: 1. the evaluation was painless but useless or 2. it was inaccurate, irritating, unfair, and a source of disgruntled feelings.

Faculty responded to the snapshots in ways that resemble their reactions to their evaluation conferences. On the last snapshot, their comments range from, 'Well, we didn't do too badly' to 'that was a nice picture of our school' to 'That was only one week out of the whole year. How do you expect to know what we're doing when you are in my room for such a brief time?' Their comments cause me to wonder whether they see the snapshots in much the same way that they see their evaluations: a biyearly event which does not necessarily influence future action. In a letter reacting to the last snapshot a teacher wrote that the staff was happy with the snapshot because there didn't seem to be anything explosive in it. She personally found the long descriptions of classrooms quite boring. She did not suggest that the faculty were looking at it to see how it informed them. She did not ask why the classroom section might have appeared boring. Her reaction suggests good humored relief that they'd come out all right. The norms for this kind of response exist in their yearly evaluations. The norms of the kind of collaborative analysis I had hoped for do not.

The fact that they haven't used the snapshots to that end is not in the least surprising, and illustrates my own naivete rather than any laziness on the part of my practitioner colleagues. The regularities, even in this changing school, have not yet progressed far enough to make true collaborative inquiry a common practice. Oak Hill has limited time for reflection. We were not explicit in our original negotiations that we hoped they would use them in discussion groups to generate action. We also sent out cover letters with each of the snapshots which asked some questions, but did not direct people to these activities.

While it has taken us some time to come clear on our differing definitions, we are now attempting to be clearer in the remaining year and a half.

At this point, another question takes shape as Sherry, Chris and I debate the evidence of usefulness. Who's definition of usefulness is most likely to move the school forward? Sherry says there are signs of the snapshots' influence everywhere—the math teachers have begun to work as a team, there is more discussion among faculty about change, teachers have begun taking responsibility for meetings—that the snapshot and the research project contribute to all of these examples of movement. Chris suggests that the faculty needs a framework to deal with the snapshots before people will dig into the tough issues like what kids are saying. I think we have learned that we need to define 'use' more collaboratively and negotiate the conditions needed to match our definition. I also wonder whether my researcher's definition is appropriate to their purposes.

Concluding Thoughts

The Coalition of Essential Schools, through the course of its partnership between a small university based staff and colleagues who work in schools, has learned over and over again how complicated, how very difficult it is to change schools into places where all students demonstrate flourishing intellectual capacity. Over and over again, we have learned how important it is for all of us to develop the analytic skills needed to redesign American High Schools, and we keep trying to build processes and activities that lead us all ever closer to that end. We are in the second season of our hybridized project—our attempt to cross the purposes of research with the intentions of changing schools. There are days when it looks as if the project generates unintended and disappointing consequences like a retriever who barks too much or a rose with larger thorns and smaller flowers. On other days, our experiment seems more successful: when teachers tackle tough issues raised in the snapshots, like tracking, then we feel as if the project is making a decent contribution to the intellectual life of the school and most importantly, to the experience of the kids. We have moments, too, when as researchers, we feel that we have understood better, described more accurately because our colleagues in schools have worked with us. Then we believe that what we produce ultimately might better reflect the deeply complex face of changing schools.

Fortunately, we have another year and a half to assess whether the similarities between the rose, the retriever and research are productive. At the moment, new roses need planting. My dog brings only things I don't need...old cans, sticks, a few of the neighbor kids' toys. Did I say useful? And we have yet another snapshot to do...

Appendix A

The 9 Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less Is More" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.

3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.

4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation — an "Exhibition." This Exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in

class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

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